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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the importance of play for a child's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. Three major purposes of the report are: (1) to persuade those concerned with the education of young children that play is an essential activity for children's well-being and should be facilitated at home and in the classroom, (2) to shed light on the special value of sociodramatic and symbolic play, and (3) to explore possible ways to observe play and to discuss how these observations can be used by parents and teachers. The importance of play is reviewed from the perspective of many different theories of development. A general normative sequence of development of play behavior is presented for infancy through age five. Daydreaming and sociodramatic play are discussed in terms of the role of the adult, recent research findings, environmental and equipment influences, and sequence of development and significance of imaginative ability. Finally, common observation methods are reviewed, with emphasis on the need for parents and teachers to refine and use observational skills. (DP)

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TOWARD PARENT AND TEACHER UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

A project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

Education, Educational Psychology, Early Childhood

by

Betty Salvay

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		iii
Chapter		
I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENT FOR THE NEED TO PLAY	5
III	THE NORMAL COURSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY	8
IV	THE BENEFITS OF PLAY	17
V	THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY AND DAYDREAMS	29
VI	THE VALUE OF PLAY OBSERVATION	43
VII	IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS	59
REFERENCES		65

ABSTRACT

TOWARD PARENT AND TEACHER UNDERSTANDING

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

by

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Master of Arts in Education, Educational Psychology, Early Childhood

January, 1974

This paper deals with the importance of play. A brief overview of some theorists' views of why children need to play and the usual sequence of the development of play are presented. The benefits of play are described, focusing on the child's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development.

Special emphasis is placed on the development and importance of imaginative play. The necessary role of the adult is explained. A description of some recent research is included which deals with children's thematic play. The sequence of the development of imaginative play is traced. The contribution which imaginative play can make to one's development is also presented.

The importance of systematized observation is stressed; suggestions are made regarding how to refine this skill. Observations made at several local schools are included.

Implications for parents and teachers are discussed with suggestions for designing curriculum and providing children with many opportunities for play. The paper concludes with some thoughts about the contribution which play can make to the individual and to society.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In many, many communities within the city of Los Angeles, one hears kindergarten teachers speak of the lack of time for play. Blocks, paints, housekeeping corners, all are being sacrificed to the "god of reading." When the daily newspapers annually publish reading test scores, the public reaction is hostile and tremendous pressure is applied to school personnel to improve the results. As a response, it has been decreed by some of the educators that we start reading instruction in kindergarten so that when our children enter first grade, they will be reading.

Popular journalists such as Pines (1967), Beck (1967) and McCormick (1962) have spoken of the desirability of teaching young children to read. McCormick states:

> Many a child eager to begin reading at three or four is being rerouted into bead stringing and block play by teachers completely convinced that the child is not "ready" to learn, when frequently it is the teacher who is not "ready" to teach him.

Sara Smilansky spoke out forcefully in 1972.

> The earlier you start teaching reading to the disadvantaged child, the better for him. We start in Israel at age four in the belief that reading should be part of very early education for the disadvantaged. Later introduction of reading leads to higher failure rates.

Smilansky speaks of the pressure of time and notes the debilitating effect of failure in the early grades. This, she feels, must be avoided.

Bereiter and Engelmann also allude to the pressure of time. They believe that a child's social-emotional health is affected by his cognitive ability. Therefore, they have developed what is sometimes referred to as a "pressure cooker" approach for disadvantaged youngsters where drill, pressure, rote memorization, reward, punishment, and exhortation are all recommended in the hope that this intense program will fire the child's own desire to achieve competence. "The atmosphere is intense. The children have no time to lose. They must move into the world created by adult society. The whole thrust of the program is to make this possible for them" (Edwards, 1971).

There are others who are dismayed by this acceleration. Piaget agrees that instruction may accelerate the transition from one state to another, but from a long term view there is some question, he believes, of whether this speedup may perhaps result in the stultifying of an individual's creative, imaginative, and speculative thinking (Almy, 1966).

For Kohlberg, specific knowledge is not as important as cognitive structural change (Feitelson, 1973). Piaget believes it is important that a child understand how he arrives at a given conclusion or answer. Exercise has to be more than just a verbal response. Learning must develop through activity. The route the child takes to reach his response must be scrutinized as carefully as his final answers (Almy, 1966).

In view of the differences, it is imperative to resolve the question of what type curriculum should be offered in early childhood programs. Should reading skills be emphasized and should some children be forced to "fail" kindergarten because they just cannot settle down to the learning of reading? Should

most of the financial support be given to the purchase of readers and workbooks rather than the purchase of play equipment? Should the teacher training programs add more courses to teach teachers how to teach reading? Or, might it be appropriate, instead, to offer courses concerned with the importance of play and its role in a child's development?

Not all countries have denigrated the importance of play. In Hungary, play is valued because it is felt that it serves to form collective traits which help individuals work well together in groups and to further the unfolding of qualities such as initiative, persistence, and concentration. They are interested in rearing public-spirited men who are concerned with the well-being of the community. The capacity for acquiring knowledge and elaborating knowledge is valued above accumulating it. The new preschool curriculum introduced in 1971 has as its foremost aim the development of the personality with much less emphasis on academic teaching. They are concerned with "education for the future," i.e., preparation of the student for self-education and the replacement of the instructing school by the educating one" (Herman, 1972).

Play is deemed such an important activity that not more than fifty minutes per day are devoted to formal studies for the oldest group in preschool and this is for a usual eight-hour day. As for children under three, manipulation and play are considered highly important and at the same time totally sufficient in Hungary to constitute the curriculum.

England has also had a tradition of valuing play. In Brighton, in 1960, the Conference of the International Council for Children's Play made an impor-

tant and persuasive statement:

> We recognize that play is one of the several factors of primary importance in the integration of the child's personality, helping him to become purposeful and creative and a happy and useful member of society.

When teachers in an Italian classroom were asked by this author how they could teach young children, aged four, from 9:00 A.M. until 4:00 P.M., they said this was only possible because the children were outdoors a great deal and could run and play. They felt play was the most appropriate and satisfying activity for children of this age.

The purposes of this paper are: first, to persuade those concerned with the education of young children, parents, teachers, and administrators, that play is an essential activity for the well-being of children and should be facilitated at home and in the classroom; second, to shed light on the special value of socio-dramatic and symbolic play; and third, to explore possible ways to observe play and to discuss how these observations can be used by parents and teachers.

CHAPTER II

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENT FOR THE NEED TO PLAY

Some of the earliest theories of play, as expressed by Spencer and Schiller, explained play as an outlet for "surplus energy." Groos was one of the first who thought of play as a child's preparation for later life. It was a way of acquiring skills needed for maturation, he thought (McLellan, 1970).

Both children and animals seem to have an innate capacity to play. They do not have to be taught to play. Hall's theory is that play represents the reliving of the history of the human race (McLellan, 1970). Although this is not fully accepted anymore, it is interesting to trace a young child's development of the use of such primitive materials as sand and water to see that they follow primitive man's course: first he handles materials indiscriminately, then he discriminately uses materials in an imaginative way, and lastly, he adopts a realistic approach to the materials.

It was Froebel, however, who made a very significant contribution to educational theory because he was one of the first who insisted that the young child learns best through his spontaneous play. This remarkable insight was then utilized by Susan Isaacs who made an important contribution to the field of how children think. She felt that play contains the necessary elements for education in the early years of life.

to explore, to go off in several different directions when analyzing a situation, the ability to apply what one has learned to new situations, and the ability to understand the feelings and needs of others. All these qualities might be learned in a play situation (Biber, 1971).

The legacy left by Isaacs and Griffiths is still felt in England today. It is believed there that educators must compensate for the fact that the lives of parents in an industrial society are often remote from that of the child; this makes it difficult for the child to find patterns he can follow which would exemplify acceptable adult behavior. They recognize that parents may need help in understanding their children's emotional needs, since so many of the traditional culture-patterns which have guided parents in their treatment of children are no longer honored. Lastly, they feel that it is the responsibility of the community to provide facilities such as play centers, to help insure that children have adequate play experiences (McLellan, 1970).

Because I, too, believe the community has an obligation to provide our children with the facilities they need to play in, in an adequate and satisfying way, I shall attempt here to develop a persuasive argument which will substantiate the need for play in the lives of all children.

She saw three forms of play activity: (1) play which helps perfect body skills, (2) play which is concerned with physical things in the surrounding world which prompts children to ask questions and develop reasoning, and (3) imaginative play which provides a means of satisfying frustrated desires and relieving tensions. Isaacs also felt that play helps children understand the relationships of things in their environment (McLellan, 1970).

Griffiths disagreed with Spencer and Shiller who explained play as an outlet for "surplus energy." To quote her:

> The child needs all his energy so great is the task that life has set him; during these early years he has comparatively more to accomplish than at any later similar period. Play, fantasy, daydreaming, these are his instruments and into these channels his energy flow. Any system of education that hampers this natural direction for the expending of energy endangers the health, mental and physical, of the child. Play is the business of life. Any system of education that is to be effective in the full sense must utilize the play-activity of the child (Griffiths, 1935, p. 322).

Dewey (1938) alluded to the importance of using children's interests and to the teacher's responsibility to create educative experiences from them. He did caution, however, of the danger of allowing the creation of interests to be the only goal of educators. Dewey insisted that whatever children study should be derived from their life experiences and since young children are so preoccupied with play, educators should build on this preoccupation.

Piaget sees play and imitation as an integral part of the development of intelligence, and consequently, explains that it goes through the same stages. He feels no need to assume a special impulse for play (Millar, 1968).

Biber (1971) is very interested in children's play. She feels play helps develop the qualities which people in our society need: the ability to question,

CHAPTER III

THE NORMAL COURSE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

Although children develop in many ways and according to varying time tables, a sequence of the characteristic development of play can be given.

Infancy

Piaget explains play as pure assimilation which changes incoming information to suit the individual's requirements. Piaget gives some examples. Starting by the fourth month, looking and touching have become coordinated and the child learns when he pushes the toy hanging on his cot, he will make it swing and rattle. Once learned, the action will be repeated again and again. This is the beginning of play. From seven to twelve months an interesting result accidentally achieved, will be repeated in an almost ritualized form. Play now becomes more than mere repetition--it becomes repetition with variations. Between twelve and eighteen months, play becomes systematic experimentation. The inseparability for Piaget of play and cognitive activity may be seen in such games as "peek-a-boo" (Millar, 1968).

According to Franklin (1973), one of the important developments which occurs toward the end of the sensorimotor period is the ability of the child to function symbolically. This allows the child to deal with more than things immediately present. He can begin to use symbols to represent non-present images

and this opens up his world dramatically. This ability is based partially upon the knowledge he obtained of his world through exploration during the sensorimotor period, and it does represent a new way to relate to and organize experience. "The use of materials in representative functioning . . . involves a distinctive orientation on the part of the person. . . . An object or pattern is not a representation in and of itself; it achieves its identity as a symbol through our orientation towards it" (p. 35).

The relationship between the representational form and that which it represents rests on some similarity which is established in the process of symbolic formation. This, therefore, must represent some knowledge on the part of the individual who is using the symbol. For example, when a child uses a walnut shell to represent a boat, he must have some ideas about "boatness" to choose an object which can simulate some of its functions, such as the ability to float in water. There is some psychological functioning on the part of the individual doing the representation. It is the symbolic orientation and the types of correspondences evident in the child's symbol formation which is of significance.

The Two-Year-Old

He is an inveterate and active watcher. He is a dawdler because he savors so much all that he sees along the way. He uses his body to understand his world. At first he explores his world through his sense of feel. The first social play is largely imitative.

It is a sign of growth for the child to throw his cherished toys out of his carriage or bed. He knows they will be returned and he can understand that they

exist, even when he does not have them in his possession.

Froebel lists a series of toys which are appropriate for the young child: first, a ball, then a truck which can be pulled or pushed. Both of these encourage imaginative play and encourage play in a wider field.

It is very important for the child to have his old familiar toys. It is a great disservice to the young child when adults constantly add new toys to replace the old ones. It is important for the child to be allowed to explore and persist in his play, if it is satisfying, since the discoveries which he makes serve as a reinforcement and help him to see relationships in other situations.

Favorite stuffed animals often take the place of the important imaginary friend. They are inseparable to the child and an important part of his inner life. The child's imagination makes fantasy his reality.

At age two, play should help develop large muscles. Large balls, blocks to pull and pile, wagons to pull, parallel bars, toys with wheels, are all important. Sand is fun to fill, dump, smooth, and pile.

Social Play

Solitary playing out of fantasies which literally ignore the presence of other people is characteristic of the very young child, usually two to three years of age, but is not common in older children if there are others about. The essence of the true egocentric attitude is that it involves a recognition of the presence of other children, but not of their personalities or independent purposes. The child needs and uses the other children for his own satisfaction, as a pivot upon which the player's fantasy can turn. In the beginning, it is assumed that

the others will agree to their designated roles. When they do not, conflict develops. The child is forced to learn to adapt in a play situation. Even the child who is drawn in as a subordinate, the baby, the puppy, etc., does learn from the experience and is often able to contribute to the play.

Isaacs (1933) describes the development of play as follows: the first stage for the child is passive watching, then there is usually some form of actively hostile behavior followed by more cooperative play. This hostility is an advance since it does connote the child's cognizance of others and is a form of relating to them. Isaacs explains this initial hostility partially as experimental in nature and partly due to the child's need for the adult's love. It is difficult for him to share adults with another child. She reports that young children usually relate more amicably to another adult. Adults seem to be lovers, and children seem to be enemies. This changes, of course, in the middle years, starting at about six years of age.

For the two-year-old, a playmate of five or six is ideal. He can only cope with one child or adult at a time. The shift can gradually be made to one two-year-old companion. The two-year-old doesn't know when he needs help. It is helpful to give warning when one is planning to change an activity. Two-year-olds love nursery rhymes. They love the familiar. The anticipation of the familiar and the joys of anticipation are more important than the novel at this age. The child is interested in learning about and understanding his world. Experiences which help him achieve this understanding are largely what he should be exposed to. It is helpful for him to have a "place of his own" in every room

in the house for some of his possessions.

The Three-Year-Old

He has arrived! He can release his emotions on an object rather than letting them explode all over the place. However, he needs an adult's help to do this. These objects, which Hartley (1957) calls "buffets," are often rag dolls which may represent members of the family. The child often uses fantasies, such as becoming a cat, if the pressures which parents impose are too much for him to cope with. The cat can do all the things which the child is prohibited from doing.

Social Play

The child of three has the word "we" in his vocabulary. He is able to share and likes to conform to the desires and ideas shared by others. This makes for group feeling and the group strengthens each individual. Social play is extremely important at this age. The child has the opportunity to try many roles. Different techniques for handling people can be tried. Hartley (1957) believes opportunities for this type of play are important or the child may experience difficulties later when trying to adjust to his social groups. She feels it is OK for adults to give suggestions which might help in a faltering situation. She also believes that the quality of children's play is dependent upon children's experiences and suggests that these be enriched. By age three, the child needs more than the companionship of his family. At this age, children enjoy nature and love to watch plants grow. They should have activities and materials to help

them develop their small muscles, for example, books which provide practice with buttoning, zipping, and tying, blunt scissors, and hammer and nails. If they want to be a baby too often, it might be that parents are making excessive demands upon them. They might be giving their children responsibilities for which they are ill-prepared, such as an unrealistic amount of household chores. Or, they might have academic expectations for their children which are inappropriate and difficult to achieve.

The Four-Year-Old

He is grandiose and a braggart. His eyes are on the future and he is rushing to be five. He is a teller of tall tales. Adults might term his accounts "fibbing." He must be led gently to know the difference between what he is and what he imagines. His play is cliquish. His feelings are expressed in forthright terms. He is unconcerned for the feelings of others. However, an adult can intervene and remedy the situation. Children easily become overstimulated and the accidental collision will become the beginning of a spectacular series of crashes if the adult does not intervene with a thoughtful suggestion. He is capable of making the newcomer feel welcome. He is an inveterate "swapper" of his possessions. The four-year-old can stay alone for an hour or two if he has a variety of play equipment. He does not need the hourly changes which the three-year-old does. Adults are important to him. He is interested in their world. He wishes he had their skills. He sometimes needs reassurance that he will get them. He loves to climb and pile packing cases, ladders, and other materials in ways which seem to defy fate and appear very hazardous. Hartley suggests that adults

try not to intervene since the four-year-old needs to emerge from these perilous situations feeling that he is gaining control. He sometimes needs help. This should be quickly given; then the adult should go back into obscurity. Children of this age do not like to be reminded of their limitations. They seem to have an uncanny understanding of their limits. Only if they are held in too tight a rein are they likely to go out of bounds.

Social Play

Boys become truck drivers and delivery men; girls become nurses and mothers. The sexes go their separate ways at this age, to a large extent. They use play to prepare for their future roles and to work out personal problems. Sometimes, in play, they are the boy or girl they want to be, and often this play spills over into their real world. Hartley suggests that boys do not play father more because they do not have the necessary props, and often, they do not know what their fathers do during the day. However, Hartley's book was written in 1957 and this condition may not be as true today. Boys enjoy playing with vehicles, especially with models of those they have seen. They love blocks and will chatter about their intricate structures which they spread clear across the room. Children delight in keeping them up for some time; Hartley suggests that it is cruel to ask the children to disassemble their creations since they are so precious to them. She says that block play is the best opportunity to incorporate a shy child into the group and feels this might be because the four-year-old is so happy, relaxed, and pleased with himself in this satisfying occupation.

The Five-Year-Old

His play is primarily practice or rehearsal rather than inventiveness. He is interested in the facts of everyday life. Trips are important because he must be there to feel, smell, hear, and to be a part of the thing he is learning about. Children should be a part of the planning. Hartley (1957) says:

> One way to prevent a five-year-old from being interested in the world around him is to raise him in a dungeon. Short of that it is almost impossible to keep him from noticing all kinds of things . . . and trying to find out how each and every one of them works (p. 119).

A pocket magnifying watch is almost a must. Magnets are fine. He likes to watch and experiment with common, everyday things. He wants to know what happens to a cake when it is baked. He is fascinated with the way gelatin stiffens. All these things make wonderful experiences. It is important that questions bring satisfaction at this age. "Five" needs to be useful.

Boys might soon want to play house and the author suggests that we allow them to do so as long as they want to. Boys and girls are very interested in babies. It is further suggested that parents take the opportunity to give appropriate information at this point so that their children's play becomes rich in content and a means for playing out their experiences and feelings in a satisfying way.

This is an age for cowboys, Indians, and guns. As long as guns are part of our culture, this will be reflected in children's play. Guns are an excuse for violence and noise--they are not thought of as deadly weapons.

Children like miniatures: for the girls, doll houses; for the boys, toy farms, forts, etc. They are interested in numbers and letters. This is a time for

reassurance and encouragement. Criticism can be very destructive.

Children should be in on the planning of their daily experiences. They need to know what to expect and not have things sprung on them. They need friends, and time to visit with them. Children are often eager for adult guidance. A favorite expression is, "How do you do it?"

CHAPTER IV

THE BENEFITS OF PLAY

Play is important for the total development of the child. Often the child's cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development may benefit concurrently. However, for purposes of organization, we shall analyze them separately.

Physical Development

Charles Darwin believed that play helped the child to acquire the skills which would be useful for the future adult (McLellan 1970). Anyone who has watched a young child delight in his newfound abilities to utter sounds, take his first steps, or later run or do other physical feats for the sheer joy of experiencing his newfound skills can watch the child practice skills which he will need in a way that is playful and pleasurable.

The importance of play for physical development is stressed in the abundant literature on perception (Kephart, 1967; Frostig, 1967).

Many of the skills which educators had assumed are learned by the child before he attends school are often absent (Magdol, 1971; Kephart, 1967; Frostig, 1967). His analyzers are not in order. Sometimes his brain is not receiving proper messages and, therefore, he cannot understand what he is seeing. The sounds which are gathered for him by his ears may either be distorted by the

receptors, or, in some cases, may not be usable because of the brain's faulty interpretation of the sense data. If, occasionally, he is unable to control movement, interpret sound or sight, or make the most of his modalities, he is handicapped in his approach to learning.

Play is essential to develop these modalities. As the child plays with sand, water, clay, finger paint, and other similar materials, he is becoming aware of how things feel. Touching and feeling must be encouraged.

A child must have experiences with movement and space to discover direction and distance. Such games as "Ring-A-Round-The-Rosy," "Hokey-Pokey," and "Loopy-Loo" help the child learn to move his body purposefully.

Gross motor training, a prerequisite for later academic work can be accomplished with the use of such equipment as bicycles, climbing apparatus, wheel toys, large blocks, balance boards, trampolines, and similar equipment (Magdol, 1971).

Finger plays are also useful for developing concepts. By asking children to simulate a person with their thumb and then telling them to make him look up, down, and across the street, for example, one not only gives the children practice in developing these concepts, but also makes the teacher aware of which children are not able to replicate these directions so that she can then provide additional experiences for them.

Such games as "Simple Simon" in which the children touch various parts of their body as directed, helps them become more familiar with their body. Any games which entail a child's learning about objects through touch rather than

through vision are increasing his tactual modality.

Experiences with rhythms are also important for gross motor development. The child's participation in galloping, running, skipping, and walking to varying beats are all important in his development.

Fine motor training can only occur after gross motor training (Magdol, 1971). Too often kindergartens provide activities which are beyond the children's ability. It is important to allow the children to explore the possibilities of working with scissors, crayons, paste, and paper. Pegs, puzzles, bead-stringing, and tinker-toys all provide fine motor training.

Auditory skills must also be developed. Listening walks, playing with simple sound boxes, and identifying familiar sounds, all help sharpen a child's listening ability.

Visual dynamics must also be developed. Kephart tells us, "I see means more than I look. It means I understand" (Magdol, 1971). There are games with balloons and balls which develop a child's visual acuity. Also, peg-boards, puzzles, and bead-stringing are helpful.

Educators are becoming increasingly concerned with the young child's motor development. In a new publication by the Interdivisional Committee for Early Childhood Education (1973), there is a large section devoted to motor development, and a developmental scale for the young child is included which has been developed by Clark. When one reads some of the tasks such as: "touch fingers independently, open and close hands alternatively," one is reminded of the value of finger play. When one sees that a major part of the test is devoted

to assessment of such skills as hopping, walking, jumping, galloping, skipping, and catching a bean bag, one is reminded of the importance of physical activities for young children. When one watches children at play he can see all these activities. We must provide children the time, the space, and the encouragement to pursue them.

Emotional Development

The psychoanalytic interpretation is that play helps release emotional stress--it makes the child temporarily omnipotent. It helps him assimilate a traumatic experience. It may help overcome a specific fear. It is a source of pleasure. Play helps the child assimilate a unique or new experience. It is a kind of test action. Play may be an effort at adjustment and self-healing. Play seems to be a substitute for reasoning. "We can put it in short formula: play stands for pre-event anxiety and anxiety for post-event play" (Peller, 1971, p. 125).

Play makes the child temporarily omnipotent. A child's sense of powerlessness is often very frustrating for him. Hartley (1952), Biber (1971), Lowenfeld (1965), and Erikson (1963) all believe that play can help remediate this situation, at least momentarily. Hartley believes that block play can give some children a genuine feeling of power and an escape from limitations. In fantasy they are gaining control over things which usually dwarf them. Gigantic structures symbolize release from a physical world that is cramping them more and more as they grow.

Biber feels that if a child can have a really full, wholesome experience

with play he will be having the most wholesome kind of fun that a child can have. She speaks of the feeling of strength which play yields to a child and the relief from the feeling of powerlessness which he often has in the adult world.

Lowenfeld, who dealt primarily with emotionally disturbed children, tried to ameliorate the child's sense of powerlessness by always getting down to his physical level, by being at the disposal of the child, and by never giving adverse criticism, blame, or reproof.

Freud valued play for the child because it allowed him to assume the master role instead of the usual passive one. He explains the young child's love of throwing his things down or hiding them as a reliving of his mother's going away and coming back, for which he has no control. The child, through his "microsphere," his small world of manageable toys is able to overhaul his ego. If appropriate and satisfying, they give the child a sense of mastery and prestige (Erickson, 1963).

Erickson proposes the theory that child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and by mastering reality through experiment and planning. To "play it out" is the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords.

Play helps release emotional stress. Hartley (1952), Lowenfeld (1965), Erikson (1963), Read (1966), and Peller (1971) all find evidence that play can offer welcome relief from stressful situations.

Play allows the child to regress, to be pampered, to enjoy the freedom of getting dirty, crawling, etc. A child may assume an animal role and do

things which would not be permissable for a child. Always, it is understood that it is only for a limited time. The child might also assume the role of a clown to cover up what might have been an embarrassing situation (Peller 1971).

Erikson (1963) says, "For quite a while, solitary play remains an indispensable harbor for the overhauling of shattered emotions after periods of rough going in the social seas" (p. 221).

Hartley (1952) feels that clay seems to be the best outlet for aggressive impulses. It is also an outlet for forbidden interests having to do with sex parts and body functions. Some anxious children find clay an ideal material for projecting their private worlds.

The child between the ages of two and four needs a channel for immediate expression of his feelings since they are so intense and he has difficulty in putting them into words. Painting at this age is a purely expressive medium and children seem especially attracted to it. It is the active process of painting rather than the product which is significant. It appears, therefore, that the period when easel painting has its greatest significance occurs when its products have their least apparent meaning.

According to Hartley, painting serves four different functions: (1) as an opportunity for messing, (2) as a disinhibitor, (3) as a means for release of aggressive feelings, and (4) as a release of anxiety. "We do know that constrained children are frequently covering up and it is more than a mere guess that painting gives them a means of expressing and relieving these feelings without forcing them to recognize what they are and without risking punishment for them."

Read (1966) feels that children can manage aggressive feelings in play without doing harm to others. They can often recover from fears and the feeling of helplessness through their play.

Lowenfeld (1965) says that the exercise of the body, of the voice, of the whole person in production of the maximum possible commotion is an absolute necessity at some time or other to every healthy child. Noise is necessary, movement is necessary, and to be healthy these must be allowed to be exactly what they are--shapeless explosions of oversurplus of energy. Children who are fearful, preoccupied with cleanliness, or wary of adults as a consequence of excessive demands made upon them are especially likely to benefit from play.

Play is a source of pleasure. Biber (1971) explains that play can help a child discover that the world can be a delicious place.

> He is tasting and retasting life in his own terms and finding it full of delight and pleasure. He is building the feelings that the world is his, to understand, to interpret, to puzzle about, to make over. For the future we need citizens in whom these attitudes are deeply ingrained (p. 100).

Biber speaks of the positive aspects of a child's emotional life which should not be overlooked. "Covering the doll lovingly with layers of blankets is as deep and important an experience as smacking and spanking" (p. 102). She goes on to say that if a child can have a really full, wholesome experience with play, this is the most wholesome kind of fun that a child can have.

Play seems to be a substitute for reasoning. Lowenfeld speaks of the importance of the equipment which she calls the "world cabinet" and the sand tray. Here are found miniature replicas for all that is contained within the

child's world. This is especially effective for children ages seven through thirteen. Lowenfeld makes the point that most of us do not know our ideas until we express them and often when we argue with a friend it is to help ourselves make sense out of our thoughts. Since words are often inadequate to the young child as far as expressing his ideas are concerned, they use this world as a means of expressing their ideas and understanding them.

Play is a kind of test action. One of the first great values of play for the little child is learning to cope with the clashes of wills between equals and the real experience of mutual activity. Isaacs (1933) explains the hostility that one often sees between young children in their play as experimental in nature. Hartley (1952) reports that children like to test their ability to cope with dangerous situations. They feel this is one way they can emulate the adult and his world which they often see as fraught with danger and risk. If play is indeed "the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords," then we must provide for its sustenance.

Cognitive Development

Through his play the child can begin to put his world in order so that he can make use of the large numbers of unrelated facts which he absorbs so eagerly from his environment. Play often leads to discovery and reason. It allows the child to reinvent and reconstruct, to think things over and to digest what information he has received. Play increases the child's repertoire of responses. Play is flexible and provides the child a choice of materials and activities. Play provides opportunity for warm interplay between parent and child.

Warm interplay between mother and child is important for cognitive development. Murphy (1972) emphasizes the importance of the mother's response to her infant's first typical games such as "I throw, you pick up." She also feels that it is significant that the well developing baby will play mother to her doll.

> The ability to turn longing into compensatory fantasy in order to cope with the loss (momentary absence of the mother) utilizes prior cognitive mastery to which the mother's explanation probably contributed. In short, it seems that not just elementary care, but active mutual mother baby play is a prerequisite for the development of cognitive structuring which can carry play beyond primitive sensory-motor stages to a goal-oriented symbolic constructive stage. Moreover, the playful capacity underlying creativity is supported by good feelings as well, partly, I believe, because it evokes the joy, the delight, the fun of the earliest mother-baby duets (p. 126).

Kagan also speaks of the mother's contribution to the cognitive development of her child. Class differences emerge clearly by twelve months of age and they appear in every one of the basic skills which the child learns during the first three years. Kagan attributes this to several conditions. First of all, the middle class mother surprises her child more. Such games as "peek-a-boo" are important in the young child's development. He believes that the more one plays with an object, in this case, the mother, the more one gets attached to it, and this attachment then leads to the child's acceptance of the mother's goals and values. Middle class mothers tend to spend more time entertaining their babies, talking, smiling, and playing face-to-face. The mother's response to her baby teaches him that he can have some effect upon the world (Pines, 1971).

Play often leads to discovery and reason. Isaacs (1930) said that imaginative play will sometimes create practical situations which may often then be pursued for their own sake and thus lead to actual discovery and reason. Dewey

(1938) suggested the incorporation of dramatic play in the classroom for the same reason. Piaget (Erickson, 1972) insists that in order for a child to understand something he must construct it himself. He must reinvent it. He must act upon his environment.

Play allows the child to digest the information he has received. Read (1966) says that play is the child's way of thinking over experience, of digesting the information he has received. Smilansky (1968) values play because it helps the child gather scattered experiences and create out of them a new combination. She also believes that play helps the child ingest facts and helps to make the world more understandable. The child learns to generalize.

Play provides for group interaction. Piaget believes that the child learns a great deal from his exchanges with his peers (Almy, 1966). Smilansky emphasizes that through participation in play, the child learns vicariously from the experience and knowledge of other children.

Play provides the child a choice of materials and activities. The child uses play to understand his world. Each has his own unique style, his favorite materials. Erikson (1972) refers to Einstein's attempt to communicate by blocks and jigsaw puzzles when he was a young child, rather than using words. He quotes him as saying:

> Man seeks to form for himself in whatever manner is suitable for him, a simplified lucid image of the world.

Could this not be one of the functions of play for the child? Read (1966) believes that learning is accelerated when the child who is exposed to a wide variety of stimuli also has plenty of time for spontaneous play.

Feitelson (1973) states that perhaps the most crucial contribution made by play is its fostering of the development of imagination and thus to creative thought. The child learns how it feels to be a creator.

Social Development

The child's first social education comes when the players of his game enforce the reality of their wishes and desires. Sharing is especially hard for the young child. If he cannot have it all he is very insistent upon equality and thus his sense of justice is born (Isaacs, 1933). Play helps the child become aware of the needs of others. It fosters cooperation and interaction.

Parten (1971) reported what a group of observers discovered about preschool play. The following is focused on the child's social development. The observers discovered that preschool children most frequently play in groups of two, although the size of the play group increases with age. They discovered that two-thirds of the two-child groups were unisexual and that the majority of the child's favorite playmates were of the same sex. It was found that I.Q. had little influence on the preschool child's friendships, but that home environment and age do influence friendships. Siblings showed a marked preference for each other's company when they attended the same nursery school. Playing house was the most social type of play engaged in by nursery school children. Sand play and constructive work with clay, paper, beads, and paints were characteristically parallel play activities. Younger and older children differ in the manner in which they play with toys and hence, in the social value the toy has for them.

Smilansky (1968) sees great social development occur as the child

learns to play imaginatively. She reports that the child learns to set his own standards for his actions and learns to respect also the standards of others. Play helps the child develop from predominantly an egocentric being into one capable of cooperation and social interaction. Through his participation in sociodramatic play the child learns to control himself in relation to his own internalized sense of evolving order. He learns to control himself and to discipline his own actions. He is learning to adjust himself to the requirements of a social setting. The child learns flexibility in approach to various situations. Smilansky also reports that children she had trained to play more imaginatively fought less, had more verbal communication, and were less hyperactive.

Freyberg (1973) reported that improved fantasy play resulted in greater verbal communication, more sensitive responding to the cues of other children, and more spontaneity.

Feitelson (1973) believes that thematic play helps the child rehearse the social skills that he will need as an adult.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY AND DAYDREAMS

Many educators: Smilansky, Feitelson, Biber, Millar, Dewey, Freyberg, Singer, et al, speak of the importance of dramatic play.

> Thus dramatic play is a special kind of tool for learning, suited to the idiom of childhood, which fuses the wondering, problem solving, and conceptualizing of the groping child's mind with the symbolic expression of the wishes and fears, longings for strength, pleasures, and pains of the former inner self. The fact that this fusion takes place actively in dramatic play is further reason to recognize it as a form of learning contributing to mastery and ego-strength (Biber, 1971).

> There is no one function of make-believe play. The child may be exploring his feelings, lessening his fears, increasing his excitement, trying to understand a puzzling event by graphic representation, seeking confirmation of a hazy memory, or altering an event to make it pleasant to himself in fantasy (Millar, 1968).

The Role of the Adult

As we review the literature, we read time and time again of the importance of a parent with whom the child can identify. Smilansky (1968) reiterates this theme. She believes that the key concept to understanding sociodramatic play is the concept of identification which is the basis for all imitative play. Identification is largely unconscious. Imitation is the means to achieve this identification. The child's image of his parent is based largely on his emotional relationship and is dependent upon his understanding of his parent's behavior and

the motives behind it. Without such understanding the translation of identification into imitative behavior will occur only in very limited form.

Smilansky stresses the fact that a child needs exposure to parent's activities and in some cases, explanation is in order, to imitate parental behavior. She suggests that a parent explain to the child why he has taken a certain action, that he break down the complex activities into simple components which the child can understand, that he answer his child's questions in a comprehensive and meaningful way, that he directly teach the child patterns of behavior to which the parent attaches special importance, and that he consistently repeat certain patterns of behavior with little or no change.

Singer (1973) agrees that an important element which fosters the development of make-believe play is the availability of a parent whose words and actions act as a model which the child tries to imitate.

An important factor in the development of fantasy disposition, according to Freyberg (1973) may be regular opportunity for contact with at least one parent whose actions and speech patterns are available for imitation. Language ability plays an important part in the development of imaginative play. It has been found by such researchers as Singer, El Konin, and Bandura and Walters that parents who respect fantasy and imaginative play, who are educated, who are verbal, and who have time to spend with their children, will have children who are more likely to fantasize and play imaginatively.

"Perhaps," says Whiting (1963), "what is most important for the play of children is the community's traditional culture and the extent to which this is a

genuine part of the adults' lives." A study was made of six contrasting cultures. It described the expectations of the adults, the amount of work that children were asked to do, the availability of toys, the time available which might facilitate play, and the general life-style of the societies. The study showed that fantasy and imitative play are practically absent in some societies and immensely rich and varied in others. It is interesting to note that economic factors, although clearly important in the number and variety of bought toys children are given and in the amount of free time they have, are almost certainly not entirely responsible for whether they play imitative and pretend games.

The children of Taira (a society of people living in Okinawa in the Western Pacific) do not come from wealthy homes and are given few or no toys. Yet, they fashion for themselves what they lack. For instance, they use discarded household utensils, empty cans, boxes, stones, leaves, etc. They make themselves helmets of cabbage leaves, pistols of bamboo shoots, trucks and boats out of empty boxes, and use stones and peas as marbles for play. The children learn the traditional Okinawan games of skill and the girls learn traditional dances by watching their elders. Their play is imaginative and varied. The quality of life which the children can emulate is considered by Whiting (1963) the source of the rich imaginative play.

One of Smilansky's important contributions to the field of children's play is her discovery that groups of children were not able to participate in sociodramatic play. Since she feels that this deficiency often affects academic achievement adversely, she has written extensively, suggesting the necessity

of adult intervention. She recommends that children be taught to play imaginatively; Freyberg (1973), Singer (1973), and Feitelson (1973) all agree.

Hartley (1952) also agrees that adults have a crucial role in nurturing the child's imaginative play, although her concept of their role differs slightly from those which have just been discussed. She recommends that children be exposed to community enterprises such as bakeries, tailor shops, cleaning establishments, etc. so that children can see both men and women at work. She believes that many boys do not participate in the housekeeping corner because they are not familiar with their fathers' occupations. Often there are not enough suitable materials provided for the boys to imitate their fathers' activities. She suggests that teachers keep groups small and set up more than one housekeeping corner so that there is a fairly good opportunity to get a good mix of boys and girls.

Hartley recommends that teachers must support the child in situations where he feels insecure, therefore, creating the opportunity for him to play a hitherto avoided role. The teacher should not push a child into a situation where he would feel uncomfortable. Instead, she must try to find out the cause of his uneasiness and then help him to strengthen himself. Hartley believes that the teacher must have insight into the basic processes of living and skill in group management to make dramatic play a vehicle for helping children understand their world and work out some of the problems which their environment might create.

Singer (1973) speaks of the contribution which parents can make. "It is especially effective," he suggests, " if the parent acts in a positive way. He

recommends that they offer simple games and toys. The parent must also provide some private time for the child so that he can recreate and act upon their shared relationship. He recalls that Freud had spoken of the child's fantasies about the mother's breast as one of the first examples of symbolic thought.

The mere opportunity provided by seeing to it that toddlers have a companion does not necessarily result in a positive social situation. The child must have developed some facility for interacting. The author feels that mothers should be sensitive to their children's styles. Singer (1973) recommends that if two youngsters of very different styles are grouped together, it might be necessary for the mother to intervene, in some useful fashion, to facilitate their play.

Some Recent Research Concerned with Symbolic Play

The subject of children's play is worthy of careful research; until recently there was very little being done. However, Smilansky's book, which was published in 1968, was seminal and some exciting studies have been done recently. Some examples of this research follow.

Smilansky designed a research project which would help to determine the most effective intervention method to develop sociodramatic play in culturally deprived groups. She attempted three intervention methods. With Group A, the researchers attempted to provide the children with more thorough observations and a better understanding of their daily experiences. The children were taken to the clinic and the store and were told a story which they were later asked to dramatize. The children were helped to understand and become aware of many significant factors in these visits. With Group B, the researchers tried

to teach the children how to convert their experiences into the raw material of play by modeling and play tutoring. At all times the teachers were to follow the natural inclinations of the children when they had initiated their play. They were only to initiate play when none had developed. Group C was exposed to a combination of the above two intervention programs. They shared the experiences of the trips with the researchers and so they had a commonality of experience. In addition, the researchers intervened as with Group B, if the children needed help with play. This meant that the teachers spent twice as much time with these children, but Smilansky feels this is not as significant as the fact that they had shared the visits to the store and clinic.

The results of the experiments showed that helping the children become aware and increasing their comprehensible experiences during their visits to the clinic and stores in preparation for their sociodramatic play concerning these themes, did not have any significance in their ability to engage in sociodramatic play. However, the other two groups, one of which was given instruction in the techniques of play and the other which was exposed both to the visits with the accompanied instruction and the teaching of techniques, improved significantly. B Group went from eleven percent who engaged in sociodramatic play before instruction, to thirty-four percent after instruction. C Group went from nine percent to forty-eight percent, and A Group went from eleven percent to twelve percent. However, none of these three disadvantaged groups approached the seventy-eight percent of children from the European control group of advantaged children.

The researchers concluded that one reason that A Group, which was given help in interpreting their experiences, did not improve significantly, was that they needed to learn some techniques for translating their experiences into sociodramatic play situations.

Feitelson (1973) agrees with Smilansky that children need models and play tutors, and that play will not automatically evolve in all cultures. She believes that this evidence has not been encountered before because a disproportionate amount of research has been done with middle class children.

Feitelson attempted to find out what factors must be present for children to play symbolically. Her study was done with a group of children from a lower middle-class neighborhood in Boston, who had both parents in the home and who had non-working mothers. The children showed little symbolic play in the experiments. It was also found that to develop this skill, children needed more than rich play materials. They needed models and play tutoring.

Freyberg (1973) found in her experiments that a very short period of adult intervention, just two hours and forty minutes, could increase the children's inventiveness and imaginative play. She planned a research project where some of the children were given warm, supportive attention while they played with puzzles and tinker-toys, while the other group was given such materials as pipe cleaners, playdough, fabrics, and a wide variety of wooden shapes.

At first, the investigators engaged in make-believe roles with the latter group, using the play material imaginatively as props. There were four story themes and the children were encouraged to participate in the story plot.

After the researchers got the children started, they withdrew their participation and it was found that the children could continue with the spontaneous play. This skill seemed to sustain itself, even after two months had passed. The children who were taught to work with puzzles, but who were not tutored to play imaginatively, showed no improvement. The author believes that modeling and direct teaching by adults can be very effective at certain points in children's development by serving as a catalyst to develop skills that are basically within the resources of the children.

Singer (1973) suggests that the child's capacity for creativeness must be nurtured by some degree of stimulation and formal structure to allow it to go beyond the limitations of the schemata available to any given child. He believes that teachers and child-care workers must be given skills to foster this type of play. He suggests the use of storytelling and role playing. As the teacher models this make-believe play, she is increasing the child's repertoire, and, as Freyberg suggested in her research, the child soon is able to play imaginatively and spontaneously without the teacher's intervention. Singer suggests that this role also be assumed by mothers.

The Influence of Environment and Equipment

The adult also designs the environment for the child, and the choices which he makes are critical. Repina (1971) contrasts the views of Soviet educators with those of Piaget. As you will recall, Piaget believes that play is part of the child's intellectual development and is sequential. The Soviet view is that imagination is formed and developed within the context of the various kinds

of children's activities and is largely determined by environmental conditions. It is thought that the nature of toys is especially important for the younger preschoolers. Fully developed play is only possible for the child when the necessary toys for the plot are present. Soviet educators generally believe that the imagination of the preschooler does not develop on the basis of play and imaginary activity in the course of perceiving artistic productions. Therefore, it is necessary that adults, relying on an appropriate approach, organize and guide this activity.

Feitelson (1973) states that there are two essential requirements necessary for play to exist: (1) there must be adequate space, and (2) there must be free access to play props that can be used at will whenever and whichever way a child chooses. She refers to Vygotsky's theory of the importance of objects which can be used in symbolic play--he calls them pivots.

In regard to nursery school curriculum, Singer (1973) suggests that perhaps too many of the nursery school activities center around such activities as painting, bead-stringing, etc., and that more time should be spend organizing make-believe games and helping children to learn to engage in this fanciful play which does take certain skills. This agrees with Feitelson's concept of nursery school curriculum. Singer feels that there would be a more exciting atmosphere and positive effect than the random atmosphere one often sees in nursery schools.

In a study with children from kindergarten, first and second grades, Pulaski (1973) tried to determine whether more highly structured toys such as Barbie dolls and realistic doll houses would foster a different kind of play than

that engendered by more primitive toys such as rag dolls and blocks and other props for simulating a doll house. She found no significant difference in the quality of the fantasy. Her conclusions were that children had already established their level of fantasy and imagination before this age. Her recommendations included the suggestion that parents engage in imaginative play with their preschool children, act as models, and make up imaginative stories and games to share with them.

Franklin (1973) emphasizes the important role the teacher can play as a provider of appropriate environments and as a sensitive sharer of the child's delights and discoveries. She suggests that the environment provide both raw materials like blocks, and realistic ones such as cars and trucks which the child can use as props. She speaks about the child's freedom to explore these materials freely as a way for him to articulate his knowledge of his world and himself. Although she recognizes that the child will seize many opportunities to use these materials representationally, she also emphasizes what she considers to be appropriate teacher involvement.

> Others (opportunities) can be promoted or even explicitly introduced by the teacher. Without goading children towards representation or being overly intrusive, a teacher can become increasingly sensitive to the emergence of symbolic function and to the various threads of its active role in relation to the child's symbolic endeavor (Franklin, 1973, p. 50).

Smilansky reports that at first, Israeli teachers were somewhat reluctant to intervene in children's creative pursuits, but explains that when teachers saw the dramatic improvement in the children's ability to role play, they decided the intervention was desirable and acceptable. Smilansky feels that these children

were hungering for just such a catalytic agent and that this newly acquired technique was satisfying and gave the children a sense of well-being. Smilansky (1968) is quite dramatic in her interpretation.

> We venture to suggest that the sense of satisfaction afforded the culturally deprived child by sociodramatic play is the sense of well-being derived from the harmonious adjustment of a psychological structuring (sociodramatic play) to the demands and necessities of the psychological structuring of the growing human creature. These children have an appetite for sociodramatic play as they have an appetite for the food required for their balanced and wholesome physical development. If prior diets did not provide them with the additional vitamins required to stimulate their imitation of the adults with whom they identified and to express this imitation through sociodramatic play, they were able, nonetheless, to sense the nutritive value of the new diet offered them once given the chance to taste it (p. 139).

Smilansky goes on to theorize that, although these children were in a state of readiness to learn these skills and had need of them, they had not learned them and suggests that perhaps they cannot be learned without adult intervention. Smilansky goes on to report that the children's language ability also improved dramatically without direct intervention. She believes that sociodramatic play with adult intervention enables children to utilize in a meaningful way both past and present experiences and knowledge formerly unexploited by them for want of necessary situations and techniques.

The Sequence of Development and Significance of Imaginative Ability

Franklin (1973) believes that the skills learned through imaginative play may be the foundation for creativity. She describes a developmental pattern for symbolic representation in play which is abstracted as follows:

First stage. --The child of one or two can feed teddy bear with a cup but

must have a real object.

Second stage. --He can use a symbol such as an orange for a cup.

Third stage. --Objects with minimal resemblance, such as a stick for a baby bottle can be used.

Fourth stage. --The child can use imaginary objects in play.

It seems easier for younger children to engage in symbolic play where they have the use of realistic props rather than non-realistic materials. They also seem more able to depict a scene, such as kitchen activities, with more accuracy than activities which are further removed from their usual representational objects. These ideas of Franklin's are consonant with the Soviet theorists as reported by Repina (1971).

The child seems first to replicate the everyday activities he sees in his intimate environment. For example, his first symbolic play may be feeding or washing his "teddy." At first play is spontaneous and cannot be initiated "on request" as readily, if at all. Initially, play is primarily "role playing." The child is an actor. Later he becomes a "world creator" albeit in miniature, and often he becomes a stage manager as well.

Singer (1973) believes that imaginative ability helps in defense functioning, helping alleviate a frustrating situation when it arises. He admits that carried to excess it might cause deficits in the learning of social skills. He feels that imaginative play is valuable for handling anxiety and for the creative exploration of the future.

Singer quotes a report by Gardner Murphy which talks about the importance of imaginativeness and daydreaming in early childhood. Murphy talks

about the presence of daydreaming in the childhood of such famous people as Tolstoy, R. L. Stevenson, Auden, and the Wright Brothers. He speaks of the ambivalence which adults have felt toward daydreaming and questions its appropriateness.

Caplan and Caplan (1973) agree with Singer's thesis that the ability to dream is a valuable asset. They believe the creative person has to see relationships easily and work with ideas until insight comes forth. Creativity comes from looking at a problem from unusual perspectives.

Feitelson (1973) believes there are factors in a child's development which may be impeded if there is an inadequate amount or absence of thematic play. Social play is necessary for mental health and can be cathartic. She also agrees with Hartley and Erikson that it gives the child a sense of mastery and makes him feel like a controller. Since a sense of inability to control events seems to be one factor which affects children's performance in school adversely, she concludes that it is important to overcome this feeling: "Not having played prevents the child from experiencing how it feels to make things happen according to one's will."

Play helps the child to ingest facts and helps to make the world understandable. Feitelson quotes Vygotsky as follows: "Play is important in the child's cognitive development and in a certain sense the leading source of development in preschool years." He believes that play frees the child from dependency upon objects for thought and allows abstract thought to develop.

Freyberg (1973) reported that a child who can play imaginatively seems

to be able to improve reality when it is unpleasant; he is able to amuse himself with his imagination when he is faced with long waits or the necessity of inhibiting natural motor tendencies, two conditions which are especially difficult for some children to tolerate and which seem to some children to be a major part of the school day.

One of the commonalities of imaginative children seems to be the possession of an imaginary friend. Terman, in his study of the highly gifted, reports that seventy-two percent of the girls and thirty-seven percent of the boys had imaginary personal companions (Valentine, 1956).

CHAPTER VI

THE VALUE OF PLAY OBSERVATION

Suggestions for Refining Observational Skills

Although it is widely recognized by educators that astute observations can yield important information about children, it has been a challenge for those educators to convince parents and teachers how much information can be obtained. It is also difficult to learn to observe accurately.

Phil Jackson (1968) speaks of the difficulty of making accurate observations. "We become distracted and look at nutty kids, mobile kids, and pretty kids." He believes that looking at one or two children in depth teaches us things which are applicable to the group. He has tried to help teachers systematize their observations. He suggests that we make teachers more perceptive and that we help teachers analyze where they stand. One of his concerns is the very unequal time which teachers spend with children. He has found that some teachers spend as much as one-fifth of their time with some children and one-three-hundredth of their time with others.

One of the reasons that accurate observations are so difficult to make, is that we tend to look at activities in a judgmental way. Thus, the parent or educator who values the use of messy materials, who believes that children need to feel some mastery over their lives, or who honors the child's need for explosive

and exhuberant activities sporadically, will view children's activities quite differently than will the person who believes that children need to learn to curb their enthusiasm and learn to accept rules and regulations without question.

Read's Observation Form

Read (1966) suggests that parents and teachers learn to analyze their reactions. She makes the following suggestions for observers.

1. Make a list of the things which children do which you dislike.
2. Analyze what children do which makes you want to step in and intervene immediately.
3. Make a list of the things which children do which you approve of or which you enjoy seeing them do.
4. As you observe the children in a group see how many patterns of behavior you can identify. For example are there:
   a. Children who seem to trust adults?
   b. Children who have many interests and engage in a variety of activities?
   c. Children who combine materials in unusual ways?
   d. Children who engage in dramatic play?
   e. Children who enjoy creative, often messy materials?
   f. Children who are conventional in their use of materials and never use messy materials?
   g. Children who seem quite dependent upon others and who follow the teacher around?
   h. Children who appear very independent?
   i. Children who seem to like many children and approach them freely?

Hartley's Recommendations for Recording

Hartley (1952) describes a methodology which she feels will help the observer learn more about children's feelings, needs, and interests. She suggests that the observer use a watch and record in five-minute intervals. The observer should describe the situation, other children present, and the teacher. Everything the child says and does, and everything which is done to him should be recorded exactly: the tone of voice, expression of face, attitude of body, and quality of movement. The prime requirements are to see what happens in a clear and unbiased way, and to communicate what is seen as fully and vividly as possible. Gross activities should be recorded in a clearly stated context and within a definite time framework. By activities is meant where the child goes, where he is, what he does, what he says and to whom. One wants to know what the child does, and also what kind of child he is. One wants adaptive and purposive behavior, and the finer details as well. The quality of behavior, which gives the record the flavor of the individual, should be included. Hartley believes that the observer should give his impressions and interpretations. She believes that a pseudo-objective report may sometimes deprive us of our most important information. She notes how difficult it is to get all the facts down and, therefore, feels one must use key words and abbreviations, and then, immediately after observation, fill in the deleted information.

The following is abstracted from Hartley (1952). When observing the child's creative activities, the following factors should be noted:

1. The number of children at the activity being observed, the proximity of the teacher, the atmosphere in the room, and the availability and ac-

cessability of materials.

2. The child's approach, where he has been, whether he comes willingly and the speed with which he gets started.

3. His mood, his apprehensiveness, his intention to make something, or his absorbtion in manipulation alone.

4. His absorbtion in the activity, his interaction with other children, and the presence or absence of daydreaming activity.

5. His use of the activity as a social contact or as an end in itself.

6. Whether his mood changes as he works, whether he becomes more or less relaxed, whether he becomes more or less talkative, and whether he is free or tense when handling materials.

7. Whether the materials are used in a conventional way or whether he explores for more unusual uses.

8. Whether the child is willing to share with others, whether he is more intent upon collecting, and whether he asks for more than he uses.

9. Whether the child is willing to make the best of the situation when there is a shortage.

10. Whether the child works rapidly or deliberately and whether the child hurries to finish or is leisurely in his pace.

11. Whether the child's body movements are restricted or relaxed, and whether he seems well coordinated.

12. Whether the child sings, talks, hums, etc.

Singer's Imaginative Play Interview

Singer (1973) has devised an instrument to determine the imaginative play predisposition of the subjects. The four following questions comprise the interview.

1. What do you like to play best? What is your favorite game?

2. What do you like to do best when you are alone?

3. Do you ever have pictures in your head when you are awake?

4. Have you ever had a make-believe friend or playmate?

Introduction to Play Observations

This paper has suggested that play is a valuable tool for promoting physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. It has also been recognized by Hartley (1952), Isaacs (1933), Lowenfeld (1967), Erikson (1963), Biber (1971), and others, that play can offer valuable information concerning a child's feelings and needs.

Three observations will now be presented. In these three instances, the children did play symbolically. It is interesting to note that there was no direct adult intervention at the time the children were being observed.

This is not in contradiction to the findings of Smilansky (1968), Feitelson (1973), and Freyberg (1973), which were cited in this paper. Their work was done with children who did not have the rich experiences and cultural background of the children observed by this author.

For purposes of clarity, the analyses of the play situations will be divided into the categories of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, although it is recognized that there is often simultaneous growth in several categories.

Three Examples of Play Observations

1. First Observation at a San Fernando Valley Elementary School: (Time, One Hour)

There are four centers in the room as the observer enters. Each of two kindergarten teachers is working with a group of eight children on a reading readiness lesson. One of the mothers is individually testing children and another mother is helping a group of eight children who are making black cats for Halloween. The observer is attracted to this latter group. As the children make the black cats they are role playing. They are making up stories and they are becoming black cats. They move as a cat does and make appropriate sounds. Even after they put the cats away they continue their role, making cat noises.

Quite spontaneously a group of five children gathers around a Lego Set which is available on a low shelf. It is quite apparent that the social opportunities are as appealing as are the construction possibilities. There is lots of talk. One child builds a large tower. He talks about how tall it is. For some children, the materials are used for building; for others, the materials are used for interacting. One of the boys suggests that two of them combine their construction to make a really big interesting one. His companion wants to keep his and doesn't agree to combine. The child whose building is the most complicated is the one trying to establish communication and cooperative group construction. His building collapses. He clowns a little and then rebuilds it. He pokes others. He reaches out to others.

One boy is noticed because he seems unable to play with other children. He watches the others, but does not try to establish a relationship. He tries to grab a component from another child. Our "leader" restrains him. He tells him to make his own components. The self-appointed leader keeps a careful eye on

the others and constantly gives suggestions. He combines his structure with a partner. They are both thrilled with the complexity of their achievement. The observer notices that its collapse is inevitable. There it goes! Laughter and joy are apparent. They rebuild it. Oh what fun they are having! They work intently and cooperatively. Our leader and his partner work very well, although the observer notices that his partner communicates with gesture and facial expression. Only later, did the observer learn that he did not speak a word of English.

The little boy who tried to grab other children's constructions continues to look glum. His construction techniques are inept, clumsy. It is apparent that he is poorly coordinated. He builds on the horizontal now. He continues to try to grab from others. Another boy comes along. He sits down in close proximity to the group and starts to play with a magnetic board which is on the shelf. He puts it away almost immediately and goes over to join in the Lego play. He is invited to play. Our "grabber" continues to look sad. He knocks his own building down. It is quite apparent that he is not accepted by the group. There are now six boys involved with the Lego. Another boy sists down close by with the magnetic board. Our leader has to leave for a short time to take a test. He returns. His structure has been adopted by the group. He tries to grab part of it from the "grabber" who won't release it. Now the boys are fighting. Their frustration level is reached. The teacher is not aware of any of the interplay. She has been working quite intently with another group. She is finished. She announces, "Clean up time." What propitiousness! Warfare is averted.

Analysis of First Observation

Physical Development. --Work with scissors during black cat activity and manipulation of Lego pieces provided opportunities for fine motor coordination.

Cognitive Development. --Opportunities for imaginative development were provided by the black cat activity. The richness of this play substantiated the Russian theorists mentioned in this paper (Elkonin, Luria) who proposed that children's imagination functions and develops quickly when there are opportunities for cutting, pasting, and constructing with paper (Repina, 1971).

Block play afforded opportunities for measuring and judging of heights and proportions. Concrete, relevant, and meaningful experiences with numerical computations were possible.

Social Development. --The Lego play provided opportunities for the children to practice social skills. A need for cooperation and group decision making arose from work with the Lego equipment and seemed to substantiate Isaacs' (1933) theory that children become less egotistic as they learn to adapt to their peer's judgments.

The atmosphere in the classroom was amicable. The teacher stated that the children displayed very little hostility. This substantiates Smilansky's theory (1968) that children who engage in imaginative play fight less.

The play situation acted as an integrator. The non-English speaking child was able to relate quite well to his peers. He was completely accepted and seemed very comfortable.

Emotional Development. --The block play provided an opportunity for the children to feel powerful and to realize that that which they destroy (as in the instance of the knocking down and rebuilding of the Lego tower), can be replaced. This substantiated Hartley's (1952) recognition of the value of block play.

A cathartic release was provided when the children were allowed to express their enthusiasm and exuberance without any restrictions placed upon them by adult intervention. This experience is termed necessary by Lowenfeld (1967), Hartley (1952), and Isaacs (1933). It will be recalled that this play situation occurred after an intense and serious reading lesson.

The children were also finding their world full of delight and pleasure, an important contribution which play can make to the lives of children (Biber, 1971).

2. Second Observation at a San Fernando Elementary School Kindergarten Class: (Time, One Hour)

As the observer enters, the children are all gathered around the teacher. They are planning the afternoon's activities. It is very important to keep in mind that there are two policies established in this room:

1. The children must sign up at the blackboard for the activity which they select because there are limited numbers of children allowed at each activity.
2. Once a child chooses an activity, he must complete it.

As the observer watches, two children are playing with blocks. They

talk about which block is thicker. They verbalize as, "Now we go up," describing the structure which they are building. They never discuss what they are building. One little boy leaves. A little girl remains. She is building a zoo. She is working alone and she seems very content and happy. A boy approaches her. She signals that she wants to work alone. She then tells him, "I want to work alone." The little boy persists. He asks if she is building a zoo. He joins her in spite of her objections. She leaves. She had built a complex zoo structure with blocks and a fine collection of animals which are available. She abandons it all because she does not want to play with the boy.

As she leaves, the little boy, who will be called Evan, takes over her structure and leaves his simpler one. He adds to hers. The teacher comes over and compliments his structure (which of course he didn't build). She asks him to sign up for the block activity.

Two children come up to look at the structure. Evan quickly destroys it. He puts the animals away. These new children now sign up. Evan never did so in spite of the teacher's request. This routine is quite important to the children and they speak quite extensively about the necessity for signing up and try to use it as a weapon to keep Evan away. While Evan is dealing with the problem of signing up (his coordination is quite poor and he finds it extremely difficult to write his name), a second boy comes along and adopts Eric's structure. He verbalizes, "This needs to be a little longer."

Two new boys come along and tell Evan that he isn't signed up and can't play. He ignores their suggestion. The animals are put back into the

structure. Evan destroys the structure. The first fight ensues. The teacher does not see what is happening. The fight subsides.

Now five children are involved (only two are allowed to be there according to the rules). Four of the boys play together and share the materials. Evan is abandoned. A newcomer tries to join the group. Evan says, "You can't play. You are not signed up." Evan now signs his name. It is barely legible. It is in the wrong place. Only two of the letters are correct. He now feels that his place is assured.

There is lots of talk about the fact that there are five playing and the rules say only two are allowed.

Another little boy says, "This is an apartment for animals." He picks up a crocodile and places it in a compartment which simulates an apartment house.

Evan wrecks his own structure. He asks the children to stay away from him. Two children are now left--Evan, and another little boy, Steven, who builds quite seriously. Evan asks Steven for a camel. A little girl who is watching gets it for Evan. He then goes over to Steven and tries to take all the blocks. Another little girl comes over to Steven and tries to help him. Evan comes over and is about to destroy Steven's building. He goes back to his own structure. He is partly in a dream world now as he pushes different animals along on the carpet. Steven now puts his blocks away. Evan takes his camel and destroys his structure. He leaves his blocks scattered and walks away. Other children come to start to build.

Analysis of Second Observation

Physical Development. --The manipulation of the blocks and small animals offered some opportunity for small motor development.

Cognitive Development. --There were opportunities for measuring the blocks, comparing the lengths and judging to see how long a block was needed for specific construction. There were opportunities for describing spatial relationships when the children were discussing where to place the animals.

Social Development. --There were opportunities for the children to learn to adapt to the requirements of a social setting, a benefit of play described by Smilansky (1968), Feitelson (1973), and Freyberg (1973).

Emotional Development. --The children were able to create a very satisfying world for themselves with the use of blocks and animals. They were learning the joys of being a creator, a benefit of play which Feitelson (1973) suggests.

Evan was able to build his own private world, very much as Erikson (1972) had described it could be done. Although he was aware of his peer's rejection, he did find comfort, momentarily, in that which he was creating.

3. Third Observation at a Private School Kindergarten Class: (Time, One Hour)

The five- and six-year-olds are especially large for their age. The observation takes place outside in an area where there is a lot of dirt and sand, boxes, a playhouse, a sandbox with some construction equipment, a tool shed, and equipment for sweeping and maintaining the area. There are hammers, nails, many dolls, stuffed animals, and cones which are usually used in road construc-

tion.

There are two children playing in their "train." It is built of several boxes which are on the dirt. A little boy comes over and jumps on a little girl. There is rather rough play: tickling, laughing, and jostling. The little boy then picks up two shells and puts them to his chest to simulate a bosom. He verbalizes this. The children are allowed to express themselves quite freely. The teacher is observing quite unobtrusively in the background. Several minutes later a fourth child joins the group. Bosoms are the main topic.

Adjacent to the train play there are three boys who are hammering large stakes into the ground. "This has been going on for two days," the teacher said. The boys are assuming the roles of miners and are very seriously planning their operation, talking about gun powder and using loose dirt to simulate this material. They are also lighting imaginary matches. The conversation is intent and purposeful.

One little boy calls another "daddy." He gives him this title since he says the other boy is older.

There is a little girl perched high upon a box immediately adjacent to the "miner's play." The recorder is leaning on the box, but the little girl is completely unaware of her presence. She is in her own imaginative world, talking to her "teddy," who is obviously assuming the role of her little baby. She is using a pan and sand to simulate food; she is feeding her baby. She is talking in a very maternal way to her animals and dolls. She is singing softly and seems content. A friend joins the little girl after she has played mommy for

fifteen minutes. The newcomer is warmly received. The friend enters by climbing up a short ladder which is the only source of access to this quiet world.

At approximately 2:00 P.M., the teacher calls the children into the classroom for circle time. The dusty miners and solicitous mother come in willingly. Two boys, however, refuse the invitation and stay outside. The teacher allows this. The two boys are talking about school. They are miners at the moment. Some of the exact conversation follows:

> "If you don't go to school you don't learn anything." (Now they are planning their mining operation.)
>
> "Let's take sand out and put it here. It's going to be a booby-trap. Their butt is going to show and we're going to see their underwear. My penis won't show. I'll cover it up."

The two boys get their shovel and start their work. After several minutes of digging, they spy two cones which are used in road construction to reroute traffic. They each take one, put it over their penis, and start jostling each other. The play ends when one boy says, "My weiner just fell off."

A little later, the children are asked to clean up the area. This is a busy and serious time. The construction tools are carefully placed in the shed according to the outlines which were previously drawn for them. The sweeping is done assiduously. Each child is asked to gather a different material. Every child seems to work earnestly.

Analysis of Third Observation

Physical Development. --There were opportunities for gross motor development as the children hammered the stakes into the ground. The teacher

remarked that many of the children who had not been able to use the hammer in the more conventional way with wood, were learning to use it hammering nails in the earth. The teacher was impressed that the children had thought of an activity which the educators had not thought of. It is a good example of a creative teacher building upon the interests of her pupils.

Cognitive Development. --Franklin (1973) had described a more advanced level of symbolic play as one in which could be found the emergence of symbolic minisystems, i.e., a smaller block is a car and the larger block is a fire engine. The instance where the little boy delegated the father role to the older child appeared to illustrate this development.

The children's thematic play centering around the mining activities represented the fourth stage of symbolic representation as described by Franklin. The children were able to use imaginary objects. The subject matter of the play also indicated an advanced stage of development, according to Franklin's theory, since its subject matter is quite far removed from the children's everyday activities.

Social Development. --There was only one instance when the teacher's intervention was needed. A little girl was crying because a boy had pushed her and hurt her. There was earnest conversation about this with the boy, his victim, and the teacher. Each child was encouraged to understand how the other was feeling and to think about ways to get along with each other more amicably. Teacher intervention is considered useful by Biber (1971), Hartley (1952), and Singer (1973) to protect the timid child and also as a way of modeling appro-

priate social behavior.

There were many opportunities within the children's play for them to learn to adapt to and become aware of their peers' ideas. There was give and take, for instance, in the mining play. Compromises had to be reached. The children were modifying their ideas based upon the suggestions of their friends. These benefits of play have been suggested by Isaacs (1933), Smilansky (1968), Feitelson (1973), and others.

Emotional Development. --It seems quite obvious that these children were given great freedom to explore their environment and their feelings. Their language was not censored. They were not subject to the overwhelming control which Hartley (1952) suggests is quite prevalent in some classrooms and which she feels is so destructive because it gives the child a sense of powerlessness.

The children were given great freedom to express their hostility. Their play was cathartic, which Hartley (1952), Lowenfeld (1967), Erikson (1963), and others have suggested is essential for the child's mental health.

The children were given sand, water, and mud; these materials are described by Hartley (1952) as being essential for young children's development.

The children appeared to feel a sense of power and importance. They were working well together. It is interesting to note that the three themes which Hartley (1952) says recur repeatedly in dramatic play: a need for protection (for mothering, babying); a need for power (over things and people); and the need to attack and destroy, were all present in the play seen here today.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Throughout the literature one is aware of an ever recurring theme. Children need a benign adult with whom they can identify and whom they will imitate in their play. Adults must provide the shared time, the private time, the space, and some of the equipment with which children can play.

As our lives change, as mothers spend more time away from their homes, as many marriages end in divorce, as t.v. impinges on our children's senses, as living conditions become more crowded and the natural delights of children such as mud, water, grass, and wildlife become more remote, the child's natural inclination to play may become atrophied.

In this paper the author is trying to show what our children will miss if they do not participate in play. Their mental health is very likely to be adversely affected if they cannot utilize play to right some of the wrongs they feel they have suffered. Their need to feel some mastery of their lives may be unmet and their fears may not subside if they cannot play out some of the situations which have caused them anxiety.

The literature has shown the importance of thematic play in the cognitive development of young children. Yet, in Los Angeles this year, the purchase of an incredible amount of new teaching materials such as workbooks, reading

tests, and commercially prepared material has forced the teacher to spend most of his time learning to use them properly. In addition, it has discouraged teachers from creating their own materials. As one visits the schools, he is apt to see a plethora of books and a paucity of equipment for dramatic play. Play seems to be regarded as an incidental activity, one which can be enjoyed when the business of learning has been concluded.

It is the contention of this author that "pressure cooker" tactics and early formalized teaching can have a deleterious effect on some children's self-esteem.

Some children's physical development will not be advanced enough to enable formal reading and writing activities. Failure and frustration may occur.

Research indicates that play can heighten a child's intellectual activities and that deprivation of necessary manipulative and exploratory activities may adversely affect later intellectual capacities.

Our teacher training institutions have an obligation to make their students aware of the importance of play. They must offer courses which will help teachers learn to utilize play as a way of learning about their pupils' emotional needs. They must learn to utilize play as a taking off point from which to build curriculum.

Griffiths spoke of the earnestness of children's play. If we could only learn to transform some of the energy and excitement which one observes as he watches children play to skill building!

As educators, we must scrutinize the environments we are designing for

our children. It seems especially important to look critically at the kinds of activities and materials we are offering to our pupils. In many cases we may be offering such a plethora of materials, especially suitable for individual activities, that children have no time to relate to each other. The attitude of the adult is important. The following is a checklist formulated by this author to help teachers assess their classrooms to decide whether they are facilitating the development of imaginative play.

Teacher Checklist

A. Physical Environment

1. Are the activities and materials appropriate for the interests and abilities of the children?
2. Is there space available and are props provided for use in dramatic play?
3. Is play equipment easily accessible to the children?
4. Is there ample time provided for play?

B. Adult-Child Relationships

1. Does the teacher seem aware of the children's needs?
2. Are there opportunities for children to feel successful?
3. Do children seem at ease with the teacher and other adults?
4. Is the teacher really available to the children when they seek her help?
5. What kinds of restrictions are imposed in regard to such matters as

movement, noise, and use of materials?

6. Is play valued by the teacher as an appropriate part of the curriculum?
7. Does the teacher ever engage in the children's play or honor their imaginative world in any way?

C. Peer Relationships

1. Do the children seem to work and play well together, to share and assist each other?
2. Are there opportunities provided for large group, small group, and one-to-one encounters?

The current literature is suggesting that parents and teachers take a very active role in the teaching of play skills. This procedure is fraught with danger. It will take great sensitivity on the part of adults to give children the tools they need to become imaginative players and yet not dominate their play or make the children dependent upon the adult's presence. The challenge will be to learn to offer the techniques of play without removing spontaneity and satisfaction.

Parents must be made aware of how important their relationship can be to their children's intellectual and emotional development. Many of them would enjoy acting as partners in their children's play. However, they often feel they are being overbearing and stifling. Although one must exercise caution so that intervention does not become domination, I believe that the writings of Smilansky (1968), Freyberg (1973), Singer (1973), Feitelson (1973), Pulaski (1973,

Hartley (1952), and others mentioned in this paper, should be read and discussed by parents. One of the facts often overlooked by parents is that the availability of playmates may not be sufficient. They may have to provide some of the know-how to foster satisfying social interaction.

Another pervasive and potentially dangerous policy practiced by many parents is the tight control they want to maintain over their children. As one reads the literature one feels compelled to help parents understand how important it is for their children to feel some sense of freedom and mastery over their lives.

In the final analysis, however, perhaps we must evaluate our children's education in terms of the needs of society, as Biber suggests. We must think about the kinds of citizens we are hoping to develop.

Singer may be correct. If one can utilize his imagination to alleviate some of the frustrations associated with long periods of waiting, his life becomes more pleasant.

Certainly our children will need to get along with others. They will need to adapt and compromise. According to the literature described in this paper, these skills are fostered by play.

Dr. Seuss (Geisel, 1955) speaks about "going beyond zebra." It is difficult to know how we can best prepare our children for their adult roles since it is difficult to know what our world will be like in twenty years. Perhaps the best preparation is to make the present as productive and satisfying as possible so that our children develop a feeling of self-worth and feel equipped to relate comfortably to others without the need to develop defensive skills which can be

be quite destructive and anti-social.

It is felt by this author that the moral development of our young people may be adversely affected if there is not sufficient opportunity for social interaction which also fosters the development of a sensitivity for the rights and needs of others. It is preparation for life, rather than for the next grade which must be of concern to educators, and the author attempts to persuade her readers that play is one of the most appropriate activities to foster this preparation.

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